The Conquest of Central Asia

The conquest of the Caucasus helped set the stage for further Russian expansion. From a geopolitical perspective, Russia's advance into Central Asia was a logical extension of the Anglo-Russian theater of competition from the Turkish straits, to the Caucasus, to the northern fringes of Persia and Afghanistan. The rivalry with England served more as a stimulant than a deterrent to Russian expansion, impelling Russia to move preemptively in Central Asia. Even as he completed his work in the Caucasus, General A. I. Bariatinskii advocated creation of a railroad linking Russian ports on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea with the Aral Sea, a step necessarily entailing the assertion of Russian power over the khanate of Khiva. Delay, he contended, would "not facilitate our success in the future, but would give freedom to our enemies to strengthen their influence and dominion in Asia."[1]

Bariatinskii would not participate in the conquest of Central Asia, but among those who did were a number of officers who, like him, had served in the Caucasus. Bariatinskii's former chief of staff, Dmitrii Miliutin, would preside over the decisive phase of the conquest during his twenty-year tenure as minister of war from 1861 to 1881. By virtue of his Caucasian experience, Miliutin recognized the complexities of unconventional war, the need for patience, and the challenges of imperial administration. When he assumed office, the immediate task in Central Asia was the assertion of Russian power over the weak but troublesome oasis khanates south of the steppe. The tsar's ministers, however, were by no means united in pursuit of this objective, the costs and risks of which were uncertain. Indeed, in 1868, Governor General Konstantin P. von Kaufman, newly appointed governor general of Turkestan, felt compelled to write a memorandum assuring critics that the costs would not surpass the benefits of ruling Central Asia.[2] Russia would consolidate its grip on the entire region in only two decades, propelled by a variable mixture of lust for conquest, desire for commercial advantages, and the ambitions of local commanders. In so doing, the army would learn a new style of warfare dictated by the harsh climate and vast deserts of Central Asia.

Dmitrii Miliutin served as a young officer in the Caucasus and as minister of war from 1861 to 1881

Governor General K. P. von Kaufman

A Kazakh tribesman (an illustration from a design by Vereshchagin)

Theater Overview

As of 1800, Central Asia was divisible into two distinct geographical and cultural zones. Its northern half was a vast steppe, subject to climatic extremes in summer and winter and populated chiefly by some 2 million nomadic Kazakhs.[3] These people ranged along the upper tier of Central Asia from the edge of the Caspian Sea in the west to the Altai Mountains along the Chinese frontier in the east. Kazakh life necessarily centered around the annual cycle of migration customary to plains herders. The Kazakhs' horses were small and not especially fast, but they were perfectly adapted to the harsh conditions of the steppe and could easily outlast even Cossack mounts over extended marches. Their lives ordered by nature, the Kazakhs needed little formal political structure and invested no more authority in their chiefs than was essential to maintain a semblance of control within and among the tribes. The Kazakhs displayed similar informality in observing the rules of Sunnite Islam.[4]

Within the context of Russia's Central Asian designs, the Kazakh steppe represented the frontier zone dividing the Russian empire from the ancient oasis kingdoms bordering Persia and Afghanistan (see map 1). Faced with unrelenting political, demographic, and military pressure from Russia, the Kazakhs found themselves in a position resembling that of the plains tribes of North America at about the same time. Inexorable encroach-

ment by Russian Cossacks and settlers drove the tribes first to resist the Russians and then to collapse under the weight of relentless demographic and military pressure. The conscious designs of Russian officials and generals aside, the unbridgeable difference between the Russian and Kazakh cultures precluded any chance of stable coexistence.

The second major zone in Central Asia was the desert expanse to the south of the Aral Sea, an area divided by several major rivers and bounded in its southeastern extremity by imposing mountain ranges. The culture in the area centered for many centuries around a cluster of fertile oases linked together by ancient caravan routes. Three so-called khanates—Bukhara (population 3 million), Kokand (population 1.5 million), and Khiva (population 500,000)[5]—dominated the desert and often extended their influence far into the steppe.

The Uzbeks, who enjoyed a long Islamic cultural tradition, an elaborate social structure, and advanced systems of agriculture and commerce, constituted the dominant ethnic group in the khanates. Slightly less influential were the Tajiks and Kirghiz, residing largely in the mountainous, southeastern corner of the region along the Chinese frontier. In the opposite, or western, corner, along the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, the predominantly nomadic Turkomans lived by means of herding, fishing, and plundering.

The khans of Khiva and Kokand and the emir of Bukhara ruled as despots. Their armies, though large, were poorly equipped and organized by contemporary European standards. Kokand and Bukhara, in particular, had developed economies and found foreign buyers for their cotton, textiles, silks, dyes, and fruits.[6] Khiva, though less prosperous, enjoyed the most secure frontiers and greater political stability. Because it was not, like its counterparts, an agglomeration of trade centers with independent traditions, but rather a discrete kingdom buffered on all sides by desert, Khiva proved less susceptible to diplomatic pressures and invasion.[7]

Russia's conquest of Central Asia unfolded in three stages, reflecting the political geography of the region. During the 105-year span from 1735, when it pushed its southern frontier to Orenburg at the northern edge of the Kazakh steppe, to approximately 1840, the Russian empire busied itself with settlement and consolidation of its borderlands in the southeast Volga region and Western Siberia. From 1840 to 1864, Russian forces enveloped the Kazakh steppe. The next step was subjugation of the three Central Asian khanates, which concluded with the fall of Khiva in 1873. Defeat of the Teke Turkomans in the 1880s constituted the final phase of conquest and brought Russian dominion to the modern borders of Iran and Afghanistan.

For the Russians in Central Asia, combat with the enemy did not in itself pose a formidable challenge once its terms were fully understood. Rather, as one contemporary Russian observer put it, the organization of supply and the acquisition of transport constituted "the most important difficulties in the preparation of a campaign."[8]

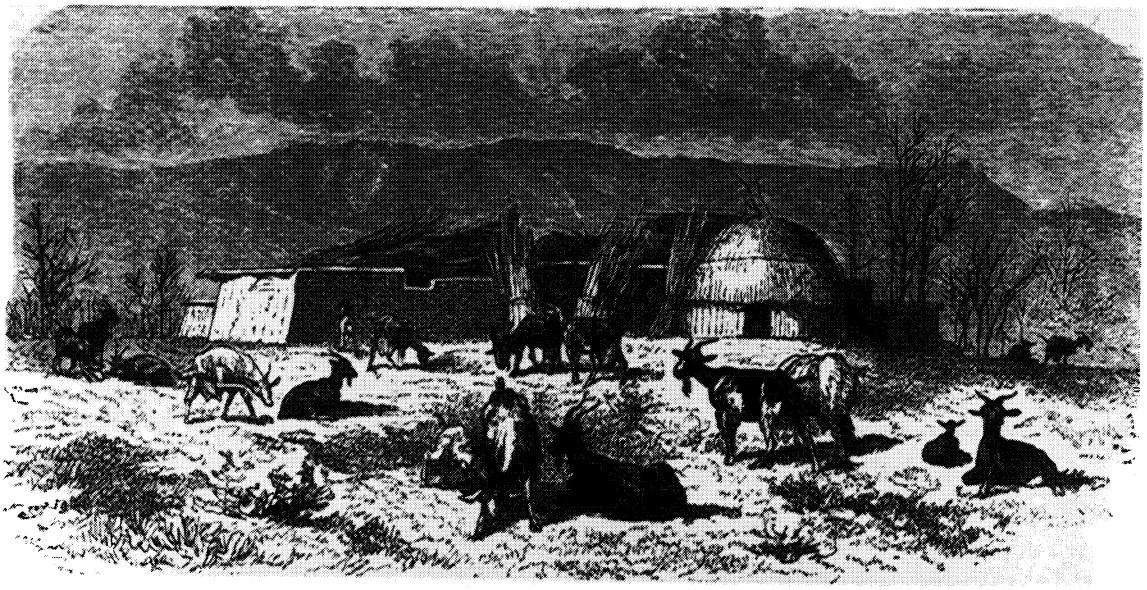
As in the Caucasus, however, military triumphs alone did not assure political stability. Pacification of the independent Central Asian tribes demanded a skillful blend of coercion, diplomacy, and patient military administration. The latter, in particular, demanded a capacity for subtle judgment and compromise by army commanders that transcended their routine concerns.

The Conquest of Central Asia

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Orenburg and Siberian Lines (analogous to the Caucasian Line) formally delimited Russian territory in Central Asia (see map 1). Each comprised a string of Cossack settlements and forts intended both to keep the Kazakhs from raiding across the border and to serve as bases for retaliatory raids into the steppe.[9] In the 1820s, Russia organized the steppe into administrative zones. Kazakh tribes in the west fell under the supervision of the governor general of Orenburg, who selected native chieftains (termed sultans) to rule in Russia's name. Each sultan received a Cossack bodyguard of about 200 men—a necessary asset since most did not dare venture into the steppe except under heavy escort. The administration of the Kazakhs farther east by the government of Western Siberia proceeded more smoothly perhaps because of their relative remoteness from the anti-Russian instigations of the khanates.[10]

Kazakh resistance to Russian domination exploded sporadically but suddenly intensified in the 1840s when a Kazakh chieftain by the name of Kenisary Kasimov began to organize the tribes against Russian rule, thereby earning the nickname of the "Kazakh Shamil." The Kazakh bands (usually less than 1,000 strong) were able practitioners of hit-and-run attacks against Russian outposts and caravans. Beginning in 1843, Russia mounted small unsuccessful expeditions (less than 2,000 men) from the Orenburg and West Siberian Lines to trap Kenisary. When pursued, Kenisary shunned battle, electing instead to disappear into the vast steppe. Army detachments foolhardy enough to pursue mounted Kazakh warriors across the prairie risked becoming lost or exhausted, thus becoming easy prey themselves. To camouflage their failures with the area tribes (knowledge of which might send other tribes flocking to Kenisary's standard), the Russians circulated declarations of brilliant victories over a fleeing adversary.[11]

In 1847, conflict on the steppe subsided when Kenisary perished at the hands of rival tribesmen. This turn of fortune presented Russia an opportunity to consolidate its political and military presence through the establishment of imperial outposts deep in Central Asia. Russian commanders, not unlike their Indian-fighting counterparts on the American plains, soon learned to direct their punitive raids against Kazakh villages and encampments for the purpose of driving off cattle, destroying property, and demoralizing the populace. Still, notwithstanding Russian gains, experience showed the futility of attempting to police the steppe from its



A Kazakh winter encampment (this illustration is from a design by Vereshchagin, a prominent Russian artist who accompanied General Skobelev on a campaign in Central Asia)

northern periphery, especially given the disruptive influence of Kokand and Khiva to the south.[12]

Khiva, long a thorn in Russia's side, intermittently seized Russian subjects from merchant caravans bound for Bukhara or from fishing vessels anchored along the Caspian coast. Peter I (the Great) engineered the first attempt to conquer Khiva in 1717, sending a force of 3,727 men under Prince Bekovich-Cherkasskii to make the long and perilous march to Khiva. The prince subsequently defeated a much larger Khivan army in battle but committed the fatal error of entering into negotiations. Feigning submission, the khan persuaded the prince to divide his force into five encampments within the city. As soon as the Russians had settled in, the khan's army swarmed over the isolated detachments and annihilated them.[13]

Russia's second attempt at conquest followed over a century later and met an almost equally disastrous fate. The genesis of the failure of the 1839 expedition under General V. A. Perovskii lay in a punitive expedition undertaken in the winter of 1825—26 against Kazakh raiders along the Emba River, a few hundred miles north of Khiva. A column of 2,310 men departed Orenburg in December and succeeded in striking the Kazakh winter encampments with complete surprise. Rather than face the certain doom of a hasty retreat into the snowy steppe, the Kazakhs capitulated quickly.[14] The experience of this campaign convinced the Russians of the suitability of movement across the steppe during winter.

The proximate cause of the 1839 expedition was the repeated breakdown of relations between Orenburg and Khiva. In 1836, furious Russian authorities had detained all Khivan traders along the Orenburg and Siberian frontiers and demanded the release of Russians held in Khiva. An exchange

followed shortly, entailing the return of 105 Russian prisoners. But no sooner had the transaction been completed than the khan seized 200 more Russians on the Mangyshlak Peninsula (an expanse of land jutting into the Caspian Sea and the site of some imperial fishing stations). Thus, in March 1839, Russian military planners proposed an expedition to force the absolute submission of the khan.[15]

The original campaign plan called for a column of 5,000 men to depart in the spring, concealing its military intent under the guise of a scientific expedition to the Aral Sea coast.[16] Perovskii selected a route from Orenburg to the upper Emba River, through the Ust Urt plateau, and along the west bank of the Aral Sea (about 1,000 miles in extent). Two considerations, however, led him to depart in the fall of 1839 rather than the spring of 1840: the readier availability of water during the winter and the precedent of the winter campaign of 1825—26.[17] Preparations, including establishment of two forward supply posts, began in total secrecy. Nevertheless, the khan learned of the unfolding operation and directed Kazakh tribes in the path of the invading army to migrate east and south so that the Russians could not requisition camels and drivers.[18]

The expedition required the procurement of about 2 camels for each soldier and over 2,000 native drivers, one for each 4 or 5 camels.[19] In the end, the Russians employed over 9,000 camels and over 2,000 horses, for which forage alone would tie up half of the supply train.[20] To ease the movement of the huge column, the Russians moved out in four separate detachments between 14 and 17 September. The detachments always stopped at least two hours before sunset to permit the animals to graze. Small groups of Cossacks deployed around the detachments at night to form a security perimeter about a kilometer from the camp.[21] After only a few days, the weather turned cold, and snowstorms, which were to plague Perovskii throughout the campaign, began to take a toll on men and animals. Upon reaching the Emba River supply station on 19 December, the column had already lost approximately 3,000 camels, and the rest could only carry reduced loads.[22]

The journey onward to the Ak Bulak supply station took fifteen days and entailed the loss of still more transport animals. Scarcely over 5,000 camels were now able to continue. Conditions in Ak Bulak itself were miserable, as the disease-ravaged garrison had been forced to withstand several Khivan attacks. His force melting away before his eyes, Perovskii realized he had no option but to retreat, though he was still over 500 miles from Khiva. During the column's return, men and animals suffered still more, and by their arrival, 1,054 men, about 10,000 camels, and a large majority of the horses had perished. Though it did not fundamentally affect Russo-Khivan relations, the expedition so alarmed the khan that he subsequently returned over 400 Russian prisoners.[23]

In the 1840s, Kokand usurped Khiva's place as Russia's foremost challenger in Central Asia by attempting to solidify its influence among the Kazakh tribes north of the Syr River. In the process, Kokand's aspira-

tions to regional hegemony collided directly with those of Russia. Even after Kenisary's death, the Russian policymakers found that "to take nomads as subjects is much easier than to hold them in obedience."[24]

Thus began a concerted Russian drive to secure a position at the southern fringe of the steppe. In 1845, Nicholas I approved a general strategy for a systematic Russian advance employing forward based fortifications and mobile "flying detachments" to subdue local resistance.[25] Converging from Orenburg to the northwest and Western Siberia to the northeast, Russian forces secured a forward frontier line at Kokand's expense. In 1847, they founded the fortress of Aralsk at the mouth of the Syr River on the Caspian Sea. Aralsk became the home base of the Aral Sea flotilla, employed in 1848—49 to map the Aral Sea and the approaches to Khiva. In 1853, the Russians captured Ak Mechet, farther south along the Syr River, and there founded Fort Perovsk. A separate force, advancing from Siberia in 1854, established the fortified outpost of Vernoe (site of modern Alma Ata) south of the Ili River and Lake Issyk Kul.

The outbreak of the Crimean War (1853—56) briefly forestalled further progress, but Russia had by this time nearly enveloped the steppe, although Kirghiz tribes beyond Vernoe remained a problem. A case in point was that of the Bugu Kirghiz. Under the domination of Kokand since the 1820s, the Bugus (numbering about 10,000 households) gave their allegiance to Russia in 1855. In response, Kokand instigated other tribes to attack the Bugus, and intermittent warfare continued until 1860 when a Russian expedition secured the newly proclaimed Alatav district. The campaigns of the mid-1860s aimed at closure of the gap in Russia's frontier between the Syr River outposts and Vernoe.[26]

In 1864, an ambitious colonel, M. G. Cherniaev, led a column from Vernoe and captured the Kokandian fortress of Aulie Ata at little cost. Almost concurrently, a detachment under Colonel N. A. Verevkin captured the town of Turkestan. The two forces then linked up under Cherniaev's command and took Chimkent by siege, thereby giving Russia a continuous line of garrisons across its southern frontier with the territories of Kokand and Bukhara.[27]

Despite their importance, such outposts bore little likeness, in design or purpose, to the border fortresses of Europe, a fact noted by a visiting foreign observer, who said, "All the steppe forts which I have seen throughout the length and breadth of Central Asia—Karabutak, Uralsk, Forts No. 1 and 2, Fort Perovskii, Djulak—are on the same pattern, a mud wall sufficient to resist any force without discipline or cannon, manned by a few hundred seasoned Cossacks."[28] No matter how simple and primitive, such permanent positions assumed tremendous psychological as well as military significance in the advancement of Russian rule. As in the Caucasus, the Russians found that the indigenous populace paid scant heed to rulers who lacked visible military strength.

The Russian conquests of 1863—64 thrust the Central Asian question to the fore of international politics—at least as far as Russia and Britain

Colonel M. G. Cherniaev (shown as a general)

were concerned. The growth of British diplomatic and commercial contacts in Central Asia during the 1840s sparked a strong competitive response from Russia. In turn, the British viewed Afghanistan as the shield for their Indian Empire and feared that continued southward advancement by Russia might jeopardize their position. Sensitive to such concerns, Russian Foreign Minister Mikhail Gorchakov issued a famous memorandum in 1864 summarizing the state of affairs in Asia and the limits of Russia's aims:

> The position of Russia in Cental Asia is that of all civilized societies which are brought into contact with half-savage, nomad populations, possessing no fixed social organization . . . the more civilized state is forced, in the interests of the security of its frontier and its commercial relations, to exercise a certain ascendancy over those whom their turbulent and unsettled character make most undesirable neighbors.[29]

In other words, Russia contended that circumstances, rather than any grand design of conquest, were at the source of Russian expansion. All Russia sought was a stable border with a responsible state and, having achieved this, would seek no further conquests.[30] Gorchakov, who wanted no clash with the British, was not wholly insincere but undoubtedly understood that there were many in his own government who fully expected, sooner or later, to make war on the khanates. Contrary views among the various ministries undoubtedly helped sow confusion at home and abroad. Russian diplomats explained their nation's subsequent military advances as the direct result of treachery by the khanates or the

unauthorized actions of overzealous commanders, a calculated fiction termed by one scholar as the "legend of insubordination."[31] In reality, ambitious commanders, acting in the absence of direct supervision and timely communications with St. Petersburg, did hasten Russian expansion, but there is little reason to conclude that they fundamentally altered its course.[32] Had Miliutin, or above all Alexander II, ever firmly intended to stop Central Asian expansion they could have done so. In fact, they generally approved advances, so long as no crisis developed in relations with Britain.

Within months of his 1864 statement, however, Gorchakov was made to look a fool or a liar. Cherniaev, promoted to major general, advanced with a small force on Tashkent, a commercial center under Kokandian rule. His first attempt to take the city failed but, undaunted, he returned to seize Tashkent in 1865. The resultant destabilization in Central Asian politics drew Russia inexorably into the affairs of Bukhara as well as Kokand. While the Kokandian khan was expending his strength in a futile attempt to hold back the tide of Russian arms, Bukhara had begun to maneuver for its own advantage, taking the cities of Kokand and Khodzhent, and might have moved on Tashkent as well had Cherniaev not positioned Russian forces there. Having established Russian authority in Tashkent, where his first act of popular diplomacy was to free the city from taxes for an entire year, Cherniaev turned in 1866 to deal with Bukhara. Before he could do so, however, Miliutin replaced him with the more responsible General D. I. Romanovskii.[33] Yet even after Cherniaev's replacement, the course of affairs changed little. Later the same year, General Romanovskii took Khodzhent from Bukhara, placing Russia in control of the rich Fergana Valley. The fall of Ura-tiube, along the Kokand-Bukhara frontier, soon followed.

General Romanovskii explained both his motives and methods in a message of 7 October 1866 to General N. Kryzhanovskii, commander of the Orenburg district: Ura-tiube, a place where no European had ever set foot, was the most important fortress of the Bukharan emir in the valley of the Syr River, and its capture was a warning to the emir to cease his recent anti-Russian behavior. Romanovskii's column departed on 7 September with a force of nineteen and one-half companies of infantry (organized into two ad hoc battalions), five "hundreds" of Cossack cavalry, a rocket command, eight mountain guns, and four 18-pound mortars. On the 23d, a reconnaissance detachment went ahead to examine the environs of Ura-tiube and entered into talks with the garrison commander. Establishing that the northern face of the fortress was the strongest, the Russians resolved to conduct their main attack from the south, the approaches to which were not obstructed by any natural barriers. Russian artillery easily blew gaps in the walls. The attackers seized the walls in half an hour, and the battle ended an hour later. Only seventeen Russians fell in combat.[34] Because it was unauthorized, the seizure of Ura-tiube displeased Miliutin, whose next communication to Kryzhanovskii directed that no further military actions in the region be undertaken.[35]

By 1868, Russian actions triggered the emergence of a strongly anti-Russian clerical faction in Bukhara that pressed the emir to orchestrate a diplomatic coalition with Kokand, Khiva, Kashgar, and Afghanistan. Given Bukhara's growing influence and central position in the region, the emir's quest might have imperiled the integrity of Russia's newly acquired territories (the district of Turkestan). Therefore, Governor General K. P. von Kaufman immediately mounted a preemptive attack against the ancient commercial city of Samarkand and routed a Bukharan army. Then, leaving a garrison of 700 at nearby Katy-kurgan, Kaufman marched off in search of the main Bukharan army with a column of 3,500 men. In late spring, he cornered his quarry—6,000 Bukharan infantry, 15,000 cavalry, and 14 light cannons (by Russian claims). Better led and far better armed, the Russians disposed of their foe easily. In the meantime, the garrison at Katy-kurgan found itself facing a full-scale insurrection within the city supported by about 40,000 attackers from outside. The beleaguered Russians held out for an entire week before Kaufman returned to restore the situation.[36]

His armies defeated, the emir acceded in 1868 to a treaty granting extensive privileges to Russia. Not only was Bukhara subject to an indemnity, but it ceded unlimited access to its markets to Russian merchants on favorable terms. Thoroughly humiliated, the emir sought to relinquish his title, but the Russians insisted that he remain as a pliable figurehead. The Russians also gained a considerable tract of territory, henceforth to be administered as the Zeravshan district under a military commandant.[37]

Russia's rapid thrusts south of the Syr River during the 1850s and 1860s were positive proof of the superiority of Russian military power over the outmoded armies of the khanates. Though much better organized politically and militarily than the steppe tribes, the khanates proved much easier to subdue because they represented inferior versions of what the Russians considered a conventional adversary. Their cities, upon which all wealth and power depended, constituted fixed objectives, and their armies repeatedly engaged the Russians in open battle, for which they had neither adequate firepower nor discipline. Even with great numerical advantages, the Central Asians of the oasis khanates had little chance of victory, a fact that emerges clearly in the record of their losses to the Russians. Through the course of hundreds of military actions during the entire period from 1847 to 1873, the Russians suffered an incredibly low 2,000 battle casualties.[38]

The Nature of Combat in Central Asia

It would be a mistake to assume that the conquest of Central Asia did not pose distinct and serious military problems. Some of these the Russians overcame on the basis of their long experience in the Caucasus. The order of column movements and the pattern of defense of the supply trains, for

example, were products of the Russian Caucasus experience. As in the Caucasus, a large expedition had to be virtually self-sufficient, though it would establish forward supply points where possible. Communication between cities and garrisons or among forces in the field was extremely difficult to maintain. The division of large forces into echelons often proved essential because the number of wells along even the best routes was seldom sufficient to accommodate an entire expedition at one time. For instance, in 1873, the Mangyshlak detachment, part of the great Khivan campaign, crossed the desert in three echelons. The first moved from 0300 to 0900, and again from 1600 to 2000. The second and third echelons were each staggered one phase back. Thus, the second echelon departed at 1600 and always remained one stop back on the trail. The third echelon followed behind the second. As a general rule, the echelons never moved beyond six hours' range from one another.[39]

Even in Central Asia, the enemy was dangerous if precautions were not strictly observed. When a column was in movement, the supply train required constant protection on all sides by the infantry. In the train itself, camels bearing wooden crates of food and other items were arranged on the outside so that their loads might hastily be employed in the construction of a laager. The advance and rear guards, consisting of cavalry (usually Cossacks), stayed within one to two miles of the main force. Cossacks also patrolled alongside the column at close range.

Russian columns in Turkestan, including vast numbers of horses and camels, could sometimes move over thirty miles in a day before stopping to establish an encampment.[40] Because of its flat, open expanses, the steppe afforded few satisfactory defensive positions for night encampments. Thus, Russian forces at rest normally organized themselves into a square formation, sometimes using packs and wagons to form breastworks. Cossacks and infantry held the outer faces, with guns and rockets situated at the corners. The horses and camels were kept inside the square, as were any livestock brought along.[41]

As adversaries, the nomads were daring and resourceful but lacked the discipline to break Russian formations or to sustain an assault. One of the nomads' preferred modes of attack was to surround a Russian column and strike its flanks and rear. But experience had shown that if the Russians held formation and maintained a strong reserve to prevent a breakthrough—the result of which could indeed be catastrophic against a numerically superior foe—they had little to fear.[42] In addition, the armies of the khanates, like the war parties of their nomadic brethren, were predominantly cavalry and showed little appreciation of military art.

In contrast, Russian columns included forces of all three main fighting arms. Infantry, however, was the most essential. Central Asian cavalry could battle regular and Cossack cavalry on even terms or better, but neither native cavalry nor infantry were able to overcome the disciplined fire of European infantry—especially with the advent of the rifle during

the 1860s. And when the enemy succeeded in pressing its attack at close range, infantry bayonets proved indispensable. The most useful Russian cavalry in Central Asia was that of the Cossacks due to the superior endurance of the men and their mounts. Though valuable for pursuit and maneuver, cavalry could not be employed in large numbers because of the great demand of the horses for scarce forage and water. Nor could detachments of cavalry long separate from the main column without risk. The native horses of the Kazakhs, inured to the hardships of the steppe, could outlast their better-bred cousins from the north.[43]

Large Russian columns of mixed forces, encumbered by long logistical trains, made little pretense of deceptive maneuver. The establishment of forward supply stations in the steppe also had the disadvantage of warning the enemy of an impending operation and its general direction. The procurement, by rent or purchase, of large numbers of camels and the hiring of drivers similarly alerted the natives. When possible, the Russians selected a line of approach that concealed their final objective, but they seldom preserved operational security for long. Any column moving in daylight could be spotted from great distances, so concealed movement was possible only at night.[44]

Russian advances into the desert frequently culminated in an assault of a fortified town. At first, commanders conducted conventional sieges, but finding most Central Asian fortifications less than impregnable, they soon came to rely on simple bombardments and storming. In 1853, employing standard engineering procedures, a siege took three weeks. In contrast, in 1861, Iany Kurgan fell to the Russians in a single day as did Aulie Ata in 1864. During this period, the Russians learned that the Central Asians lacked the firepower and discipline to keep storming troops away from their city walls. Russia's adoption of rifled artillery in the 1860s was especially noteworthy. Unlike the smoothbore weapons of the past, higher-velocity rifled guns easily battered and penetrated the clay fortifications prevalent in Central Asia.[45]

With the establishment of permanent forts deep in the steppe, the Russians no longer regularly sent detachments ahead to set up temporary supply stations. When on the march, the greatest enemy of the Russian soldier was not the Central Asian he was sent to fight but the ravages of extreme heat or cold, disease, thirst, and exhaustion. Normally, the purpose of reconnaissance and the interrogation of natives was to determine the location of wells. But even with an adequate supply of water, conditions in a train were often grueling and unhealthy. On a large expedition, the sick and wounded required isolation in field hospitals, or if the column was large enough to provide protection, they could travel separately.[46] Fuel was often scarce, and although the native grasses burned well, they did not grow abundantly. The consequent use of animal dung for cooking fires, in turn, necessitated the procurement of pots with lids so that the food would not be tainted by foul odors.[47]

Khan Seid Mahomet-Rakhim, the khan of Khiva

The Khivan Campaign of 1873

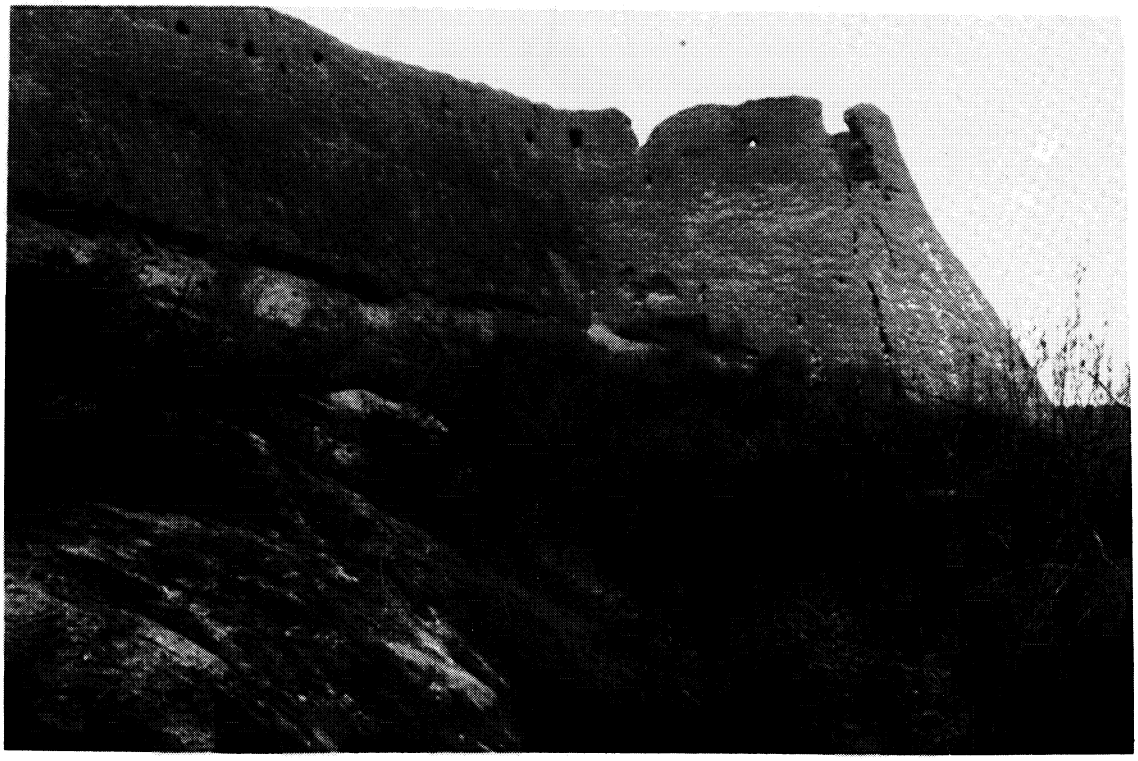
Slowly and methodically, the Russians adapted to local conditions and grew bolder in their thinking. The submission of Bukhara in 1868 led Russia almost inevitably to renew its quest to tame an old nemesis, the khan of Khiva, and thereby gain control of the Amu River all the way to the Afghan frontier. In 1870, Miliutin himself suggested that a campaign against Khiva was inevitable.[48] One important step making possible an advance on Khiva from the Caspian shore was the establishment in 1869 of a base at Krasnovodsk. During the next several years, Russian columns from the Caucasus Military District extensively reconnoitered the Transcaspia region and the periphery of the khanate.[49]

Surrounded by scorching deserts on all sides, the khanate of Khiva made a formidable objective. In addition to the oasis population of over 400,000, the khan claimed sovereignty over neighboring Turkoman nomads, many of whom paid him heed (and taxes) according to the expediency of the moment.[50] Historically, the khan had relied on his geographical position and its harsh environment as his principal defense, but he also maintained an army of variable size, consisting of infantry (mainly Uzbek and armed with antiquated muskets) and cavalry (mainly Turkoman). Though less

than a model of efficiency, the khan's army could make life extremely difficult for an adversary worn down by the trials of a desert campaign.

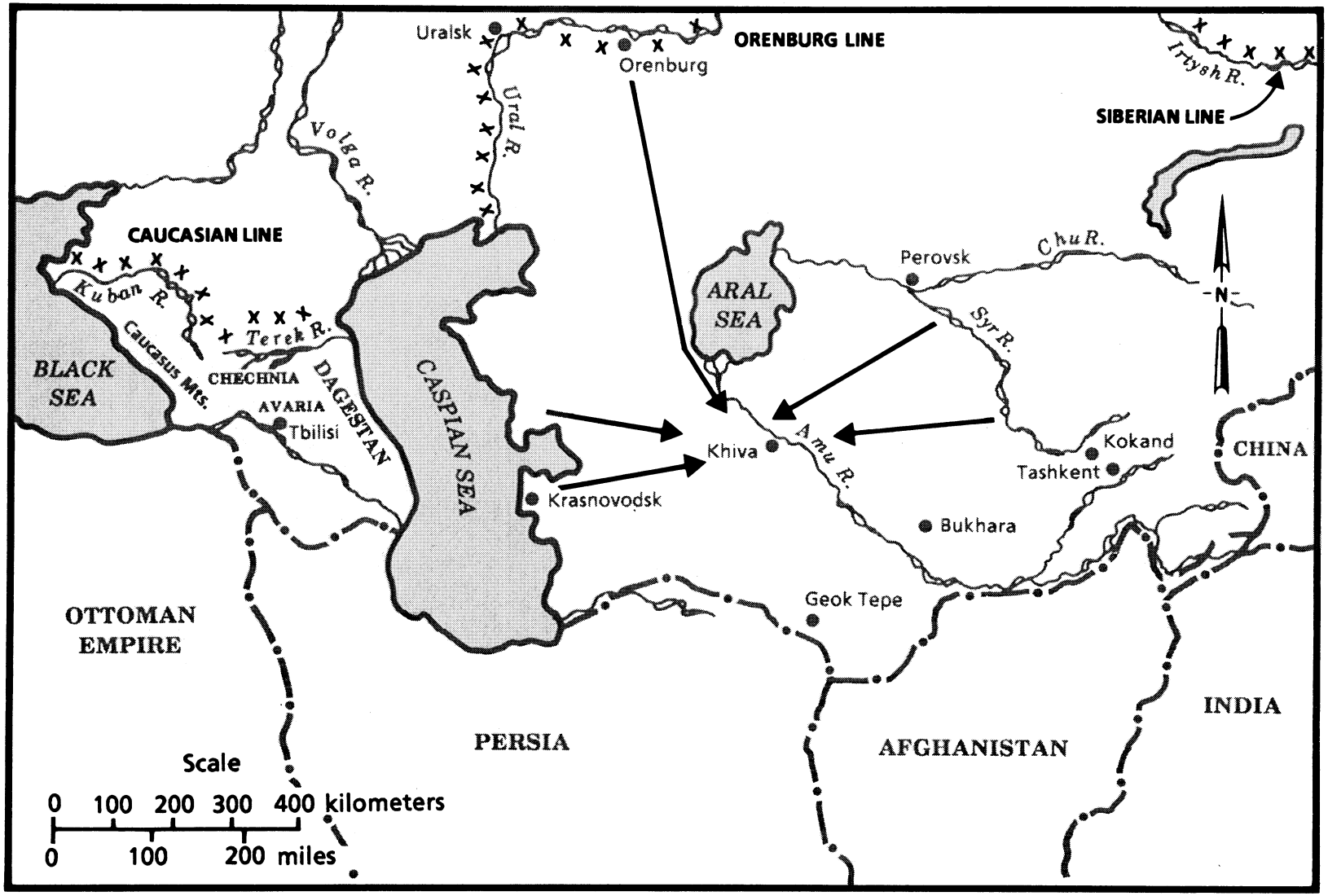
Aware of the perils ahead, Governor General Kaufman was not content to entrust the Khivan expedition to the command of the Caucasus Military District. Command rivalries may have played a role in the decision, but it was equally justified on the basis of past disasters. Thus, Kaufman resolved to launch simultaneous expeditions from the Caucasus (using forces ferried to the eastern shore of the Caspian), Orenburg, and Turkestan—all under his overall command.[51] Notwithstanding security precautions, Khan Seid Mahomet-Rakhim learned of Russia's intentions and did his best to impede Russian preparations. In order to disrupt the formation of an expedition from Krasnovodsk, the khan used his influence among the Kazakhs of the Mangyshlak Peninsula to deny Russia access to their camels. In addition, in 1872, the khan sent an embassy to Krasnovodsk, and then on to the Caucasus, to seek accommodation with Russia. By this time, however, Russia had lost interest in negotiating with the khan, and Kaufman executed his plan.

Kaufman launched his campaign in the spring of 1873 so as to reach Khiva before the advent of the deadly summer heat (see map 7). According to Kaufman's plan, 2 columns would depart the Turkestan District—1 from Tashkent (actually forming in Dzhizak) and the other from Kazalin—and traverse a distance of 600 to 700 miles. They were to link up upon reaching the Amu River (demarcating the end of the desert and the threshold of the



Courtesy of Dr. Robert F. Baumann

The remains of the old city wall of Khiva (a modern view)



Map 7. The Khivan campaign, 1873

Khivan oasis) and cross together to join up with other advancing forces. The third column, originating in Orenburg, was to travel the greatest distance, almost 1,000 miles. Meanwhile, two additional columns formed by the Caucasus Military District were to move from Mangyshlak and Krasnovodsk, permitting the shortest (perhaps 500 miles) but not the easiest line of approach.[52] The Russians divided the Turkestan and Caucasian forces into separate columns and subdivided the columns into echelons, reflecting the normal Russian concern over the availability of water en route.

Despite lengthy preparation, the Russian columns encountered severe difficulties on the long march. The Dzhizak column, under Kaufman's personal command, departed in March but met terrible heat in April. Several times, Kaufman had to split his column, which in one instance was so badly extended that his lead and rear elements were seven and one-half hours apart on the trail. Eventually, he directed his cavalry to proceed by a separate route and join him at the Amu River. (For the composition of Russian forces in the Khivan campaign, see table 2.)[53]

TABLE 2
Composition of Russian Forces in the Khivan Campaign

	Companies	*Squadrons*	*Guns*	*Rocket Launchers*	*Men*	*Horses*	*Camels*
Dzhizak column	12	5½	14	4	3,400	1,300	7,000
Kazalin column	9	1½	8	4	1,900	350	7,000
Orenburg column	9	9	12	6	3,500	1,800	5,700
Mangyshlak column	12	6	6	3	2,100	650	1,500
Krasnovodsk column	12	4	16	3	2,200	500	2,600

Source: A. I. Maksheev, *Istoricheskii obzor Turkestana* (St. Petersburg: 1890), 313—15.

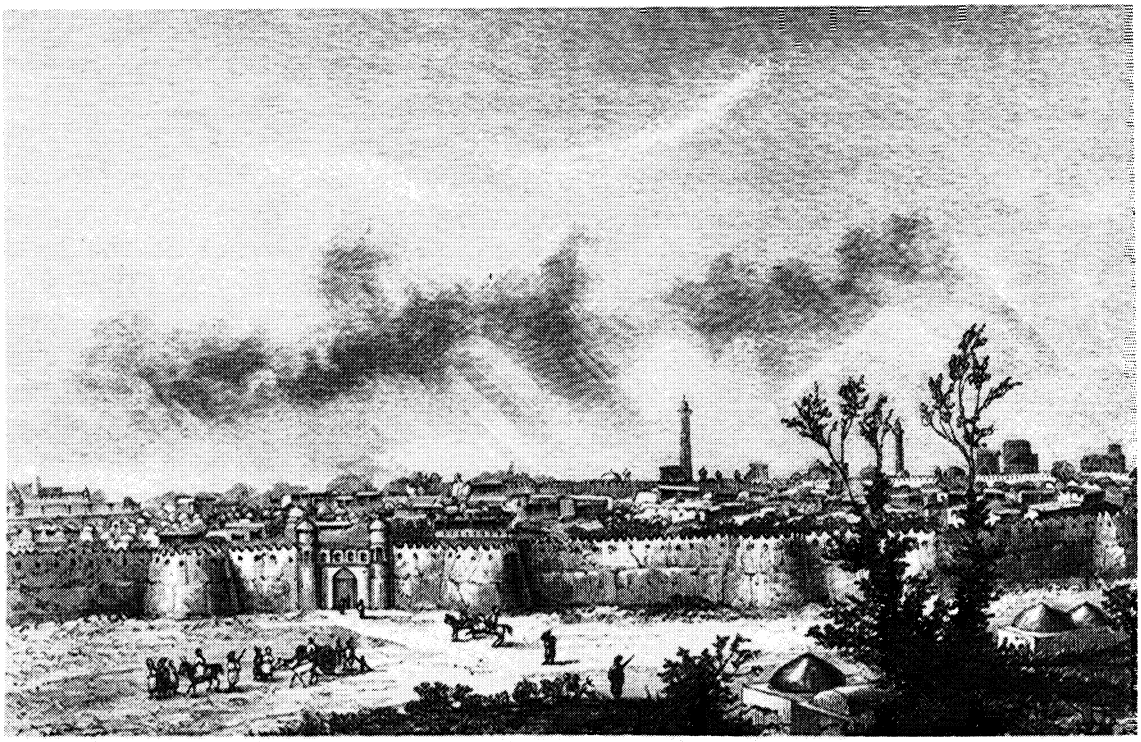
Kaufman's first concern upon reaching the frontier of the khanate was to establish contact with the other converging columns, from whom he had heard nothing since 30 April, and to explain his presence to the local populace. On 14 May, the general dispatched riders to the other four columns, only two of whom reached their destination. Meanwhile, he sent proclamations to the inhabitants of nearby villages informing them that the emperor was not making war against the "peaceful laborers" of the region but rather against their ruler, who was implacably hostile to Russia and oppressed his subjects. Kaufman promised no harm would come to those who would remain in their villages and carry on their normal affairs. Conversely, those who chose to flee or resist would be considered enemies and forfeit their property. On the whole, the Russians received a satisfactory response and found some natives to be quite helpful as guides or procurement agents.[54]

Poised on the Amu River, Kaufman no longer faced a water shortage but found he had all but exhausted his forage and could no longer rely on his transport animals. Therefore, the Russians availed themselves of native

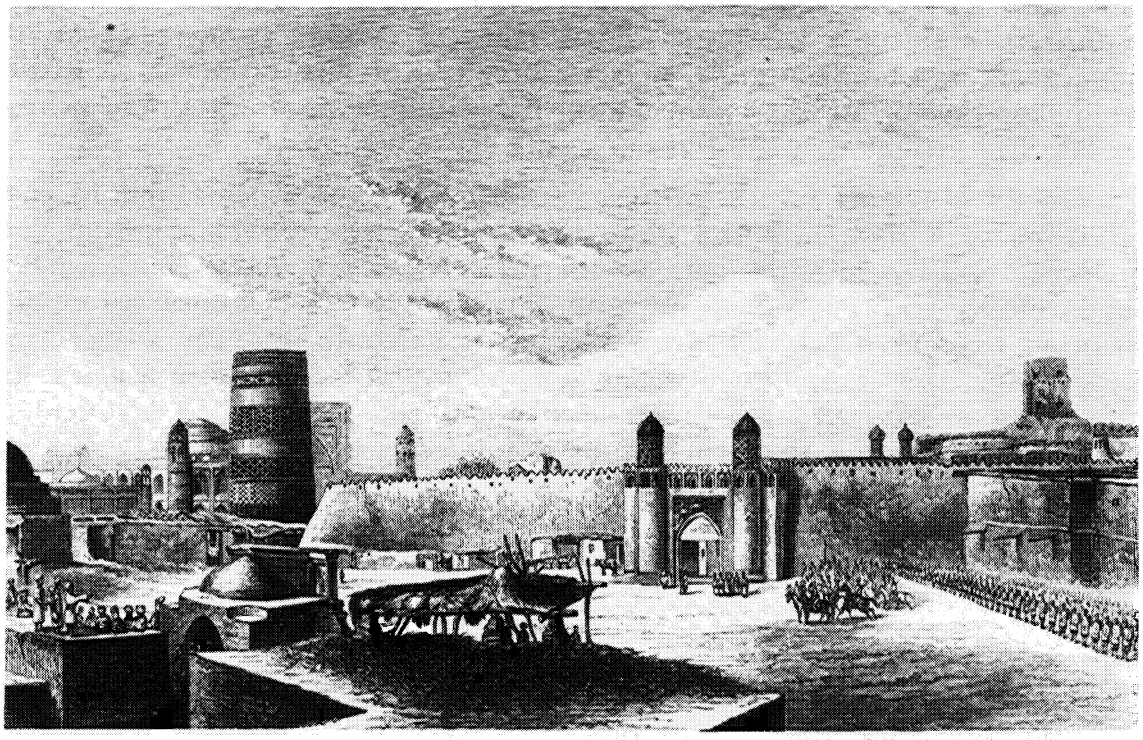
carts over the remaining short distance to Khiva.[55] Kaufman used a modest flotilla of three small iron rowboats, dubbed "Kaufmanki" (or "little Kaufmans"), in exploring the river and supporting the crossing.[56] Meanwhile, Kaufman left three squadrons of cavalry to hold the crossing and advanced with twelve companies of infantry, three "hundreds," and twelve field guns.[57] Having made it this far, he was virtually assured of success.

The Orenburg column, given the long familiarity of its officers and men with the harsh conditions of the steppe, was especially well prepared. Assembling in February, the column marched to the northwest shore of the Aral Sea in mid-April, proceeding in four echelons through deep snow. On 8 May, the Orenburg column approached Kungrad, and on 12 May, lead elements of the Caucasus detachment arrived signaling readiness for the final push toward Khiva.[58]

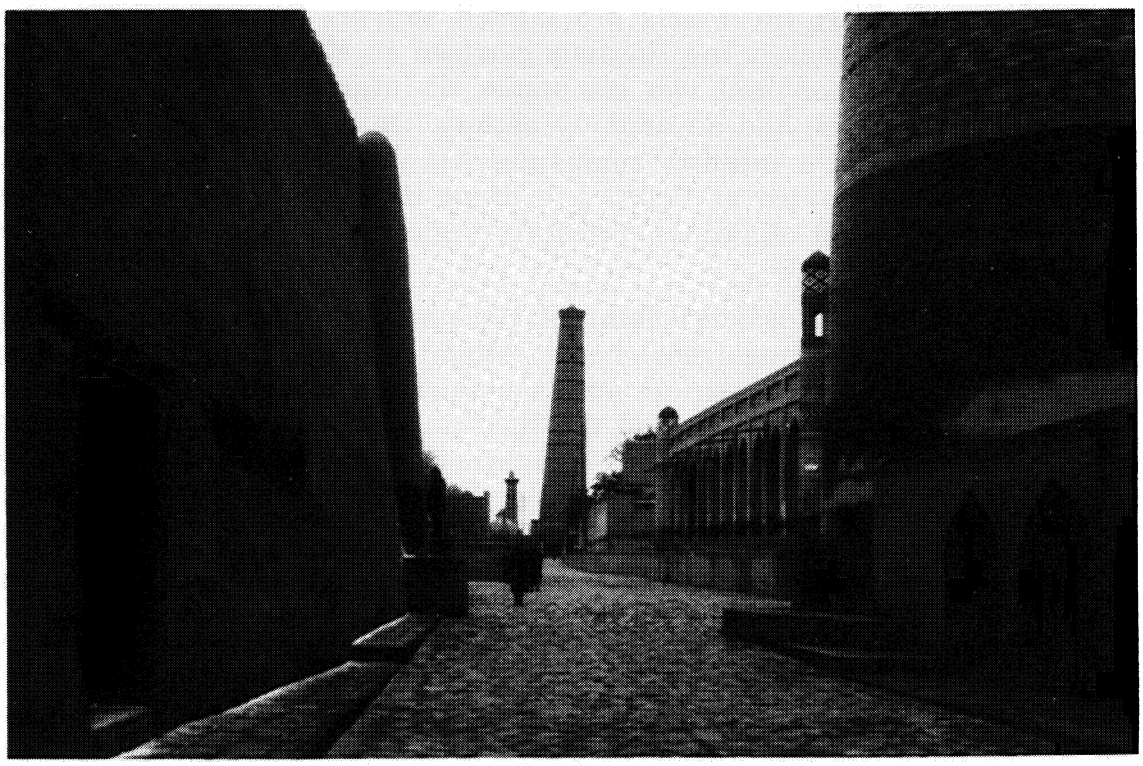
The Mangyshlak column, perhaps as a consequence of the khan's efforts, was unable to obtain the required number of camels. As a result, its commander, Colonel N. P. Lomakin, had to reduce his infantry by a third, from eighteen companies to twelve. Among his six cavalry squadrons were elements of the Dagestan Irregular Cavalry Regiment, consisting of mountaineers from the very populace so recently conquered in the eastern Caucasus.[59] Even Lomakin's reduced force, which departed Kinderli Bay in April, suffered terribly in the fierce desert conditions and barely reached its supply station at Bish-akt before the men were unfit to continue. The second Caucasian column, the Krasnovodsk detachment, had been unable to complete the journey from Chikishliar across the desert and withdrew to



Khiva and the Hazar-Asp gate



The great square at Khiva



Courtesy of Dr. Robert F. Baumann

A street in modern Khiva (a restoration of earlier structures)

the coast. On 12 May, Lomakin joined forces with the Orenburg column at Kungrad, making a combined detachment of sixteen companies, eight squadrons, and fourteen guns. A large force of Khivans, estimated at 6,000, conducted several attacks against them but withdrew after sustaining heavy losses. The actions cost the Russians only seventeen men.[60]

On 28 May, all forces gathered under Kaufman's command in the environs of Khiva, and the khan, recognizing the inevitable, sent an emissary offering to surrender. By the resultant treaty, Khiva forfeited its lands on the right bank of the Amu River and, like Bukhara before it, granted extensive privileges to Russian merchants.[61] From a military perspective, the campaign of 1873 demonstrated the power of Russia to project its military strength throughout the region. Accumulated experience, meticulous attention to supply and reconnaissance, the establishment of temporary and permanent garrison posts, and tactical superiority made Russian arms all but irresistible in Central Asia. Nature (the climate and topography) had been the Russians' greatest enemy, and it had been overcome.

The Final Phase of Conquest

With the submission of all three khanates, the problems of military administration of the region assumed precedence. Trouble first erupted in Kokand, whose ruler, Khudoiar Khan, was unpopular in his own right—in addition to being an instrument of the tsar. In July 1875, a rebel uprising drove the khan from Kokand into the protection of the Russian Army. Within a short time, the rebels proclaimed support for Khudoiar's son, Nasr-Eddin, and attacked the Russian garrison in Khodzhent, which consisted of one battalion and two companies of infantry, a local militia, a squadron of Cossacks, and an artillery battery. On 9 August, a detachment consisting mainly of 4 infantry companies left the fortress and engaged a horde of rebels estimated at 10,000 and drove them to the outskirts of the town. From Tashkent, Kaufman promptly organized a large expedition to deal with the rebellion.[62]

On 22 August, a Russian column of 16 companies, 9 squadrons, and 20 field guns engaged a huge rebel horde estimated at over 40,000 (probably an inflated figure) near Makhram and was quickly surrounded. Well-directed infantry and artillery fire enabled the Russians to break the encirclement, and an attack in columns followed against enemy positions. A young commander, Colonel M. D. Skobelev, led three squadrons of Cossacks on an attack against the flank of the retreating rebel mob and pursued the scattered remnants for about six miles. Russian casualties in the action totaled six killed and eight wounded.[63] Kaufman followed up his victory with a march on Kokand, from which the rebel leader, Abdurakhman-avtobachi, fled with about 8,000 horsemen. The Russians continued their pursuit to the town of Margelan and beyond. Nasr-Eddin had little choice but to sue for peace and ultimately ceded to Russia all former Kokandian territory on the right bank of the Syr River.[64]

M. D. Skobelev (shown as a general)

What Russia failed to recognize was that Nasr-Eddin had not created the rebellion and that his capitulation did not spell its end. In a pattern foreshadowing the chaotic 1920s, throngs of rebels gathered under the banner of Pulat-bek, a relative of Khudoiar Khan, in the eastern fringes of Kokandian territory, and made a stand at Andizhan. On this occasion, a determined and well-organized defense blunted a Russian assault. The reduction of Andizhan was left to Skobelev, whose recent exploits had brought him rapid elevation to major general. Skobelev attacked Tiura-kurgan and Namangan in succession, carrying the latter by means of heavy bombardment and assault by storm. He then advanced to Andizhan and simply bombarded the defenders into submission. By the end of the year, Russia abandoned its intention to restore Khudoiar to his throne, despite an invitation for his return from the city elders. Instead, Skobelev received orders to occupy the city, and in February 1876, Tsar Alexander II proclaimed the annexation of the entire Kokand region.[65] In order to cement control over the Kirghiz tribes of the remote, mountainous region of southeastern Kokand, Skobelev led a small column officially described as a "scientific expedition"—so as to calm the British—into the Alai Valley in the foothills of the Pamirs. His purpose was to impress upon the inhab-

itants Russia's ability to project its power to all corners of its new territories.[66]

Yet, as in the Caucasus, the establishment of military superiority was only a part of the equation for effective rule. In 1867, the tsar affirmed the formation of the Turkestan governor generalship, embracing the Syr-Darya and Semireche oblasts (as well as territories to be acquired subsequently, such as Fergana in 1876 under Kaufman). The investment of full military and civil authority (to include foreign relations) in a single individual, Kaufman, streamlined administration. An experienced administrator, Kaufman had served in the Caucasus and knew the pitfalls of treading too heavily on native customs and beliefs.[67] Accordingly, Russia moved patiently and deliberately in the imposition of a new administrative order, showing at least nominal respect for the forms of local social life. To do any less would have been reckless in view of the small numbers of Russians (perhaps 25,000 men) and the dispersal of their forces.

As a practical matter, Kaufman at first found it expedient to rule through native institutions and officials when possible. During the first ten years of his administration, he frequently was diverted from tasks of government by the need to conduct military operations. Still, Kaufman successfully established order in Turkestan. In 1877, in the wake of disorders across Kokand, Kaufman discarded indigenous economic and social institutions in favor of the Russian system of administration. Recruitment of Russian bureaucrats to Central Asian service was a problem, however, as few with any alternative prospects would accept such a purgatorial career.[68] Meanwhile, Russia did not vigorously pursue a policy of settlement in Central Asia as it had elsewhere on the imperial periphery. Colonization was an expensive proposition, and many in St. Petersburg doubted the wisdom of investing in Central Asia.[69]

Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877—78, the outstanding problem of Russian rule in Central Asia was the stubborn resistance of the Turkoman tribes of the Teke oasis in Transcaspia (modern Turkmenistan). Further, tensions with Britain necessitated a speedy subjugation of the Turkomans.[70] In 1879, General I. D. Lazarev, commander of the First Army of the Caucasus, led a detachment of about 6,000 men (8 1/2 infantry battalions and 10 squadrons of cavalry) into the Teke oasis to subdue the recalcitrant nomads. The campaign began inauspiciously when Lazarev died of an infection on the trail and General N. P. Lomakin assumed charge. Despite supply problems, Lomakin pushed hurriedly on to Geok Tepe near the Iranian frontier, where about 20,000 Turkomans had gathered in a great earthen fortress. The Russians quickly took the outer defensive positions and pounded the fortress with artillery fire. Large numbers of Turkomans, among them many women and children, poured out of the fortress only to be driven back by Russian fire. Believing his enemy in disarray, Lomakin arrogantly elected to storm the fortress and thereby handed the outgunned Turkomans a stunning opportunity. Able to meet the Russians in close, often hand-to-hand combat, the Turkomans repelled the invaders with pikes and sabers, inflicting 453 casualties.[71] Lomakin withdrew in disorder.